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SUBJECT: KUWAIT SUPPORT FOR MUSCAT-BASED ESTH HUB

REF: A. KUWAIT 1830

[B](#). DOHA 733

[C](#). SANAA 918

[D](#). 04 MUSCAT 274

[1](#)1. (U) Embassy Kuwait strongly supports the establishment of an environment, science, technology and health (ESTH) regional hub in Muscat. Although the Gulf countries confront many of the same challenges as their counterparts in the Levant and Maghreb, there are many ESTH concerns that are unique to the sub-region. Embassies Muscat, Sanaa and Doha have already raised a number of reasons that such a hub should be considered (refs B-D). We agree with their assessments, and add a few additional items for consideration.

Hydrocarbons: Blessing and Curse

[1](#)2. (U) The majority of Gulf economies depend heavily on hydrocarbon exploitation. While essential to these countries' economic well-being, hydrocarbons exert tremendous pressure on the fragile Gulf ecosystem. The challenge, therefore, is to reduce the pollutants generated by petroleum and gas production by improving environmental standards and developing cleaner technology. Like all oil producers, the Gulf countries must struggle with this apparent dichotomy between economic development and protection of the environment. Until recently, most favored the former -- oil and gas exploitation -- over the latter. It would be extremely useful to have a regional ESTH officer, particularly someone with expertise in petroleum issues, who could help guide these countries toward more environmentally sound policies and techniques.

Water: New Technologies, New Problems

[1](#)3. (U) Water scarcity is a real problem throughout the Arabian peninsula, one that the wealthier countries have partly resolved by using desalination. Desalination technology in the Gulf is among the most advanced in the world, and could be an area in which GCC scientists and experts could provide advice to other nations with water supply problems. At the same time, however, the relatively large quantities of water that desalination provides -- and the irrational water pricing system in most countries -- has led to significant abuse of water resources. This is readily apparent in most GCC capitals, which are beautified with heavily irrigated, non-drought resistant landscaping. The net effect of these policies has been a disruption in the water tables and the development of a culture of serious overconsumption. Water management is also a huge issue as Kuwait moves to exploit different petroleum deposits, using water and chemical injection techniques.

Strong, Non-Political Opportunities for Cooperation

[1](#)4. (U) As reported ref A, Kuwaiti scientists, policymakers and citizens who are concerned with ESTH matters are eager to expand their ties with the U.S. These individuals recognize that U.S. scientists, technology and expertise are among the best in the world, and they are anxious to take advantage of any opportunity to collaborate. Indeed, the recent opening of science and technology-oriented universities in the region, many of which have ties to U.S. institutions (Kuwait's Gulf University of Science and Technology, Cornell's medical school in Qatar are two examples), demonstrates that there is a thirst for U.S. knowledge on science, technology and health issues.

[1](#)5. (U) In Kuwait, our interlocutors have identified a number of areas in which they would like to enhance cooperation: exchange programs for scientists, seminars and exhibits to showcase new technology, and technical assistance to strengthen laws and regulations. Reporting from other posts suggests that similar demand exists throughout the Arabian peninsula. In a region that can be hostile to U.S. foreign policy initiatives, increasing contacts on issues of common interest -- like ESTH -- would foster greater mutual understanding, dispel mistrust and further strengthen bilateral and regional relationships. A Gulf-based regional ESTH officer could serve as an important resource for such information and scholar exchange programs, and for increasing U.S. cooperation with the states of this key region.

LEBARON